

# MENTAL ILLNESS

## More Alike Than Different



### What is mental illness?

- **The term “mental illness”** covers a spectrum of psychiatric disabilities that may be severe, temporary or permanent, or even intermittent. At times, symptoms disappear altogether.
- **Mental illness includes** disabilities that affect a person’s ability to think, feel, and relate to others.
- People with severe mental illness often have difficulty coping with the demands of ordinary life, are particularly vulnerable to stress, and may lack the social skills that are part of everyday functioning.
- **One out of four families** is affected by mental illness.

### What are the most common types of mental illness?

Just as there are many kinds of physical illness, there are different types of mental illness. The most severe and persistent mental illnesses are:

- **Schizophrenia**—a serious and disabling mental disorder that affects 1 in every 100 people with onset usually occurring in late adolescent. Those who have schizophrenia experience emotional withdrawal, confused speech, and high levels of anxiety. At times they may hear voices and their thinking may be distorted. At other times, these symptoms may disappear.
- **Affective disorders**—the most common mental illnesses, occurring in about 6 in every 100 people. These disorders are marked by disturbances of mood, and lead to severe depression or emotional highs. They are generally less disabling than schizophrenia.
- **Less serious or severe mental disorders** include mild depression, phobias, and anxiety disorders, occurring in about 1 out of every 4 people.

### Do people with mental illness ever get well?

- **Absolutely. About 80%** of people suffering from acute mental disorders are discharged from treatment within a relatively short period of time.
- **People with mental illnesses have normal intelligence.** Many are college graduates and professionals.
- **With proper medical treatment** and a supportive environment, people do recover and lead productive lives as contributing members of society.

### What do people with mental illness need?

- **People with mental illness need and want basic things** as family and friends, affordable and safe housing, and the chance to acquire and use job skills.
- **Mental illness, like physical illness,** may require specialized treatment.
- **Community care is important** in the recovery of mental illness. Studies have shown that when basic supports, including stable and adequate housing, are provided treatment of mental illness is more effective, the frequency of hospitalization is reduced, and people lead more productive lives.

### Why is it important for people with mental illness to live in the community?

- **This is their community, too.**
- **People with psychiatric disabilities have a right to choose** where they want to live, just like everyone else.
- **They have the same privileges and obligations as other citizens.**
- **They do not lose their rights because of their disabilities.** They, too, are concerned with such things as neighborhood safety, affordable housing, convenient shopping, access to transportation, and proximity to family and friends.